

Message Text

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22

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9824

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, TH

SUBJ: STRIKE DEVELOPMENTS

REF: A) BANGKOK 4924 B) BANGKOK 5017 C) BANGKOK 5132

1. OVER THE WEEKEND BANGKOK'S DOCK WORKERS RETURNED TO WORK AS PART OF AN UNEASY TRUCE WORKED OUT BETWEEN RIVAL UNIONS, SHIPPING COMPANIES AND THE PORT AUTHORITY. DOCKWORKERS AGREED TO ACCEPT A FIVE BAHT PER DAY WAGE INCREASE TO EIGHTY BAHT PER DAY ALONG WITH A PROMISE BY SHIPPING COMPANY AGENTS TO HIRE ONLY UNION MEMBERS. THE SHIPPING AGENTS ALSO AGREED TO EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY OF USING A CENTRAL HIRING HALL RATHER THAN THE EXISTING SYSTEM WHICH PROVIDES PERMANENT JOBS FOR APPROXIMATELY 1500 DOCK WORKERS BUT FORCES ANOTHER 3000 TO SCRAMBLE FOR DAY LABOR POSITIONS AVAILABLE ON AN IRREGULAR BASIS FROM THE VARIOUS SHIPPING FIRMS.

2. WICHIAN SRIWICHIAN, PRESIDENT OF ONE DOCK UNION, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THE PERMANENCE OF THE SETTLEMENT WOULD DEPEND ON COOPERATION AMONG RIVAL DOCK UNIONS AND THE SINCERITY OF SHIPPING AGENTS IN THEIR PROMISE TO CONTINUE NEGOTIATIONS REGARDING INCREASED WAGES AND A UNION RUN CENTRAL HIRING HALL.

WITHIN MINUTES OF THESE CONCILIATORY REMARKS WICHIAN BE-RATED LEADERS OF A SECOND UNION, PRESENTLY AN ALLY CLAIMING THE UNION IS SUPPORTED BY SHIP OWNERS AND THE GOVERNMENT.

COMMENT: IN-FIGHTING AMONG BANGKOK DOCK WORKERS UNIONS IS

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CERTAIN TO CONTINUE UNDER THE CURRENT BATCH OF EMOTIONAL

AND UNCOOPERATIVE UNION LEADERS. BY REQUIRING SHIPPING AGENTS TO HIRE ONLY UNION MEMBERS THE CONCEPT OF A "CLOSED SHIP/DOCK" MAKES ITS FIRST APPEARANCE AMONG THAI LABOR MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS AND PROVIDES DOCK UNION LEADERS WITH ADDITIONAL AUTHORITY AS WELL AS A MEANS OF LIMITING THE PROLIFERATION OF RIVAL UNIONS.

3. EFFORTS TO SETTLE THE SIAM CEMENT GROUP STRIKE SUFFERED A REVERSAL WHEN A COMPANY EXECUTIVE THREATENED STRIKING WORKERS WITH A PISTOL AT A PLANT OUTSIDE BANGKOK. WORKERS FROM A STRIKE BOUND PLANT IN BANGKOK WERE RECRUITING NON-STRIKERS AT THE KAENG KHOI PLANT WHEN THE INCIDENT OCCURRED. WORKERS PROMPTLY LEFT THEIR JOBS ISOLATING SEVERAL PLANT MANAGERS INSIDE THE FACTORY.

4. WITH STARTLING SPEED, PROBABLY RELATED TO SIAM CEMENT'S INFLUENCE IN HIGH GOVERNMENT CIRCLES, THE LABOR RELATIONS COMMITTEE REVIEWED THE FACTS OF THE SIAM CEMENT CASE AND CAME UP WITH A COMPULSORY ARBITRATION RULING. NONETHELESS, LEADERS OF THE STRIKERS HAVE INDICATED THEY WOULD CONTINUE THE NOW ILLEGAL STRIKE. THE COMMITTEE'S DECISION REJECTED EMPLOYEE DEMANDS FOR A COST OF LIVING INCREASE AND INCREASED VACATION LAY. HOWEVER, HEALTH BENEFITS WERE EXTENDED TO INCLUDE SPOUSES AND MINOR CHILDREN NOT COVERED UNDER OTHER HEALTH PLANS AND SEVEN AND TEN PERCENT PAY DIFFERENTIALS WERE GRANTED WORKERS ON THE SWING AND NIGHT SHIFTS. MANAGEMENT HAS AGAIN TAKEN OUT NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS ANNOUNCING THE BASIS FOR THE ARBITRATIVE DECISION AS WELL AS THE DECISION'S TERMS AND EFFECT.

5. COMMENT: WITH THIS COMPULSORY ARBITRATION DECISION OF THE LABOR RELATIONS COMMITTEE THE RTG HAS FINALLY MADE AN EFFORT TO CONTROL THE DEMANDS AND ACTIONS OF LABOR. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT STRIKERS HAVE IGNORED THE COMMITTEE'S RULING. HAVING MADE THE RULING THE RTG NOW FACES THE QUESTION OF HOW TO ENFORCE IT. IT IS UNLIKELY THE RTG WILL ATTEMPT TO COMPEL WORKERS TO RETURN TO WORK. MANAGEMENT MAY ATTEMPT TO DISMISS STRIKERS AND REPLACE THEM WITH NEW WORKERS, BUT IT IS FAR MORE LIKELY A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WILL BE REACHED CONFORMING TO THE GENERAL TERMS OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMITTEE DECISION WITH MANAGEMENT PERHAPS CONCEEDING A FEW ADDITIONAL BENEFITS TO THE WORKERS.
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